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Cotton Hose - When the Silk Mills Close

A broadcast by Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Wallace Kadderly, Office of Information, broadcast Tuesday, August 5, 1941, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, over stations associated with the NBC Blue Network.

--ooOoo--

WALLACE KADDERLY:

Now, here's Ruth Van Deman with some very timely news on a very timely subject - women's hosiery - cotton hosiery But, Ruth, the story's yours to tell.

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

Thank you, Wallace. I'm glad to do the telling. When the silk mills close, it's time to talk of cotton hose.

KADDERLY:

But your textile specialists have been doing more than talk about cotton hose for several years now.

VAN DEMAN:

You're right they have - much more. They have over 150 designs for full-fashioned stylish looking cotton stockings ready for manufacturers to take right over and put onto their knitting machines tomorrow.

KADDERLY:

And I understand you have an experimental knitting mill set up at Beltsville Research Center where you're working out more designs.

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, I was out there yesterday and saw it in operation. Mr. David Young, who was here on the Farm and Home Hour with us once, is in charge of the hosiery designing and the operation of this experimental mill. Before he went into this cotton hosiery project he designed silk stockings.

KADDERLY:

That's what I wanted to ask. Will these designs for cotton stockings work on the same machines that made silk?

VAN DEMAN:

Most of them, yes. Or let me put it this way. Around eighty-five percent of the machines that were making silk hose up to last Saturday night when the Government order stopped them, can take over most of our designs for cotton hosiery without buying a single new piece of equipment.

KADDERLY:

Well now, Ruth, do you mean these cotton stockings designed by the Bureau of Home Economics are as sheer and fine as the silk stockings these mills have been making?

(over)

VAN DEMAN:

Mr. Young's designs range all the way from cobweb mesh to service weight. Some are a very fine plain lisle But seeing is believing Just a second I'll show you. I gathered up a few samples and brought them along in my bag ... These for instance are like a very fine French lisle.

KADDERLY:

Are these really all cotton?

VAN DEMAN:

100 percent ... American grown, long staple cotton. The cotton fibers were combed to take out the short ones and leave only the very longest. And after they were spun into yarn, the yarns were mercerized to give that beautiful soft luster. Then they were what the hosiery people call "gassed." That means they were run through a flame that singes off the tiny fuzzy ends of the cotton fibers and leaves the yarn very smooth. I almost said as smooth as silk. But that isn't right, and I think the sooner we get away from the idea of cotton stockings being a substitute for silk stockings the better. Cotton has a place in a woman's hosiery wardrobe just as silk or synthetic has when they're available. Each have advantages and disadvantages over the others.

KADDERLY:

Each should stand on its own feet Excuse me, I didn't really mean that as a pun.

VAN DEMAN:

Didn't you? ... Well, we'll forgive you anyway. Men have a right to poke a lot of fun at women these days over the way they're taking the stocking situation.

KADDERLY:

What, Ruth, do you mean to say you haven't joined the mob at the hosiery counter?

VAN DEMAN:

No, I haven't bought or tried to buy a single pair since the rush began.

KADDERLY:

Maybe you have a lot on hand.

VAN DEMAN:

Three new pairs, that's all. I figure that since we've worn the kind of crazy hats we have for the last few years and called them stylish, we can wear most any kind of stockings we want to and think they're all right too. So I'm just going to wait for developments.

KADDERLY:

I think you've got something there But getting back to the subject of that fine cotton yarn. Is there enough of that fine, smooth cotton yarn on hand to thread up the hosiery machines and start 'em rolling again?

VAN DEMAN:

I suppose not --- right now - today or tomorrow or even next week. This silk situation zoomed up pretty fast last week. The cotton manufacturers didn't have

much time to prepare. But I have a lot of confidence in what American industry can do when it starts in to lick a problem. And of course there's some rayon and synthetic available for hose.

KADDERLY:

I understand though quite a lot of the rayon and synthetic supply has to go for military defense purposes.

VAN DEMAN:

So I understand. And American women are the biggest stocking buyers in the world. For the last few years we've bought around 40 million dozen pairs of full-fashioned hose alone. That's not counting the sport socks and other circular-knit footwear of one kind and another.

KADDERLY:

But all the designs that your textile people have worked out are for full-fashioned cotton hose. Am I right?

VAN DEMAN:

All except for some campus socks in gay colors for the college girls and some very high quality socks for men.

KADDERLY:

Well, Ruth, are any of these Bureau of Home Economics designs in commercial production yet?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes - several of them.

KADDERLY:

Can women buy them in the stores?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, but we can't say which stores and where Our job is to develop the designs and release them to the trade. That's what Congress instructed us to do and gave us money to do in 1939. Ruth O'Brien, Chief of our Textile and Clothing Division, is in charge of the whole project. Beside Mr. Young creating the designs, she has other specialists doing rub, and stretch, and various laboratory tests on the experimental stockings before the designs are released to the trade.

KADDERLY:

Yes, I understand it's a well rounded piece of research and very much in the public interest right now.

And thank you, Ruth, very much for coming over today and bringing us up to date on it...

(Ad lib ---- additional information may be had from Bureau of Home Economics, USDA, Washington, D. C.)

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